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LIT 110.01: Introduction to Literature

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Intro to Lit (LIT 110.01)

Fall 2020

Professor Rob Browning

e-mail: rob.browning@mso.umt.edu

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs: 12:00-2:00; Fri: 12:00-1:00; and by appointment. I can meet you via Zoom (see link on our Moodle Homepage) or, by request, outside.

"What an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles. But one glance at it and you're inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, an author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time."

-- Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, Part 11: "The Persistence of Memory" (1980)

Course description: This course is about interpreting literature, with the primary goal of helping you to read with greater understanding and pleasure. Our focus throughout the semester will be the question of how interpretation works: in short, what makes a given literary text meaningful and (quite possibly) interesting? How should a text's genre—its adherence to the conventions of drama, epic poetry, or fiction—affect the ways we go about making sense of it? What do the most basic elements of literature (diction, figurative language, voice, sound, and structure) contribute to a text's potential meanings? How do personal experiences and perspectives affect what each of us sees in a text and the ways we each interpret what we see? How can one's understanding and appreciation of a particular work of literature change over time?

In the spirit of a 100-level literature course, we will be studying a wide variety of texts, including short fiction, poetry, one play, one novel, and a film. I have chosen our readings with great care, and believe you will find each one of them (each in its own way) to be thought provoking. I hope you'll also find many of them to be enjoyable and even moving. As William Wordsworth observed more than two centuries ago, we "have no knowledge...but what has been built up by pleasure"—and this, he claims, is as true for the sciences and the professions as it is for the arts. But what does Wordsworth really mean by "pleasure"? Over the next three months we will work towards answering this not-so-simple question, particularly as it concerns literature.

Required texts:

William Shakespeare. *Macbeth* (Penguin), ISBN: 9780143128564

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven*, ISBN: 9781416556961

Readings on Moodle (see class schedule)

I strongly encourage you to acquire hard copies of the required texts because a book made out of paper can enable you to annotate a text easily and in lots of different ways. Also, perhaps more importantly, a book allows you to disconnect from electronic devices, which can help you read with greater patience, care, and insight. Reading Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* on a smart phone is like trying to hit a baseball with a toothpick.

Graded work: (percent of final grade)

Your contributions to our discussions -----	25%
Midterm essay -----	25%
Term paper -----	25%
Short assignments & quizzes -----	25%

Discussions: Exploring literature in the company of other readers is an opportunity to learn about the texts in ways we never could as solitary individuals. Our discussions will be the heart of this class. This is where we'll make observations, exchange ideas, and raise questions about each work we study. There will be opportunities for discussion most classes we meet, but Fridays will be devoted primarily to discussion. Occasionally, we may conduct our discussions remotely, either via Zoom or by written forums on Moodle. I'll offer you written comments about your contributions a couple times during the semester.

Midterm essay and term paper: Each of these essays is to be a thesis-driven, analytical discussion of a well-defined topic that concerns one of the literary texts we have studied. To earn a passing grade your essay will need to have: 1) a strong thesis; 2) convincing textual support for your main interpretive claims about the literature; 3) paragraphs that are conceptually well-developed and coherent; and 4) writing that is consistently clear and easy to understand. For the term paper, you will need to discuss your own ideas in relation to what others have said (in peer-reviewed sources) about the topic that is your focus.

Short assignments and quizzes: The short assignments will include a reading autobiography and focused close-reading tasks. Quizzes will focus on testing your familiarity with key concepts relevant to our readings that week.

Note on final grades: All written assignments must be completed to earn a final grade of "C" or higher. In order to earn a final grade of "B-" or "A-" or higher (respectively), at least one of your formal essays must earn a grade at that grade level. In other words, to earn a final grade of B-, B, or B+, you must earn a grade of "B-" or higher on at least one of your formal essays.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a violation of scholarly trust. According to the Provost, "Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code ([Student Code of Conduct](#)). Violators of the Student Conduct Code will receive an "F" for the offending paper. Each essay you submit must be signed at the bottom of the last page, assuring that the work is your own, except where indicated by proper documentation. Your signature is your word that the essay is free of plagiarism.

Accommodation: The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Specific objectives of the course:

To develop your understanding and appreciation of extraordinary works of literature.

1. To learn the distinguishing characteristics of the major literary genres (poetry, drama, fiction) and to interpret specific examples in light of these characteristics.
2. To practice performing insightful, interesting close readings of literary texts.
3. To engage thoughtfully with a range of different perspectives concerning the central ideas and aesthetic characteristics of a literary text.
4. To become proficient in writing rhetorically effective essays (well-reasoned and grammatically sound), driven by a thesis and sustained by an organized, coherent argument.
5. To learn the conventions of formatting an essay and documenting secondary sources.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

According to the pace of our discussions, we'll deviate from the following schedule from time to time. I'll announce any adjustments to the schedule in class and by e-mail.

Week one:

- 8/19 Weds. Introductions; E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (1909)
- 8/21 Fri. "The Machine Stops"

Week two:

- 8/24 Mon. "The Machine Stops"
- 8/26 Weds. Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat" (1897)
- 8/28 Fri. Discussion

Week three:

- 8/31 Mon. W.E.B. DuBois, "The Comet" (1920)
- 9/2 Weds. H. P. Lovecraft, "The Music of Erik Zann" (1922)
- 9/4 Fri. Discussion

Week four:

- 9/7 Mon. **Labor Day**
- 9/9 Weds. Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1953)
- 9/11 Fri. Leslie Marmon Silko, "Lullaby" (1981)

Week five:

- 9/14 Mon. **Reading autobiography due.** Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (1983)
- 9/16 Weds. Ted Chiang, "The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate" (2007)
- 9/18 Fri. Discussion

Week six:

- 9/21 Mon. Robert Frost, "Design"; Gary Snyder, "Off the Trail"; Walt Whitman, "When I Heard the Learned Astronomer"; e. e. cummings, "in Just-"
- 9/23 Weds. Gerard Manly Hopkins, "The Windhover"; Galway Kinnell, "Blackberry Eating"; Ted Hughes, "Thistles"
- 9/25 Fri. Discussion

Week seven:

- 9/28 Mon. Percy Shelley, "Ozymandias"; Robinson Jeffers, "The Purse-Seine"; Anne Sexton, "Riding the Elevator into the Sky"
- 9/30 Weds. Maya Angelou, "Africa"; Bob Dylan, "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)"
- 10/2 Fri. Discussion

Week eight:

- 10/5 Mon. John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"; Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est"; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Pains of Sleep"
- 10/7 Weds. Thylas Moss, "The Magnificent Culture of Myopia"; Aracelis Girmay, from "The Black Maria"
- 10/9 Fri. Discussion

Week nine:

- 10/12 Mon. Writing tutorials via Zoom

- 10/14 Weds. Writing tutorials via Zoom
- 10/16 Fri. **Midterm essay due**

Week ten:

- 10/19 Mon. *Macbeth*
- 10/21 Weds. *Macbeth*
- 10/23 Fri. *Macbeth*; discussion

Week eleven:

- 10/26 Mon. *Macbeth*
- 10/28 Weds. *Macbeth*
- 10/30 Fri. Justin Kurzel's film adaptation of *Macbeth* (2015); discussion

Week twelve:

- 11/2 Mon. Database orientation: finding secondary sources
- 11/4 Weds. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven*
- 11/6 Fri. *Lathe of Heaven*; discussion

Week thirteen:

- 11/9 Mon. *Lathe of Heaven*
- 11/11 Weds. **Veterans Day observed**
- 11/13 Fri. *Lathe of Heaven*; discussion

Week fourteen:

- 11/16 Mon. Strategies for using secondary sources
- 11/18 Weds. Writing workshops
- 11/20 Fri. Final projects due by 3:00 PM

University guidelines regarding COVID-19:

- Mask use is required within the classroom
- Each student is provided with a cleaning kit. The expectation is that students will clean their personal work space when they arrive for class, and before they leave the classroom
- Classrooms may have one-way entrances / exits to minimize crowding
- Students should be discouraged from congregating outside the classroom before and after class
- Specific seating arrangements will be used to ensure social distancing and support contact tracing efforts
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom (which requires mask removal)
- Information on the nearest "refill" stations for cleaning supplies/hand sanitizer if applicable
- If the class is being recorded, students must be notified of the recording
- Stay home if you feel sick and/or if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms